

Message Text

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FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS'S VISIT TO SYRIA

REF: STATE 215513

1. THE FOLLOWING REPORT OF THE RESULTS OF SARKIS'S SEPT 1 TRIP TO SYRIA IS DRAWN FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH SARKIS HIMSELF AND MICHEL KHOURY, WHO IS ONE OF SARKIS'S ADVISORS AS WELL AS A FRIEND. MUCH OF THE REPORT COMES FROM KHOURY AS SARKIS, ALTHOUGH FRIENDLY, WAS NOT TOO RESPONSIVE. HE IS NORMALLY CAUTIOUS AND RESERVED BUT ESPECIALLY SO THESE DAYS WHEN A FALSE STEP COULD JEOPARDIZE HIS PRESIDENCY BEFORE IT COMMENCES ON SEPTEMBER 23.

2. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, ASAD AND SARKIS HIT IT OFF WELL ON THE PERSONAL PLANE. AT LEAST SARKIS CONSIDERED THAT HE HAD DEVELOPED A GOOD RAPPORT WITH ASAD DURING THEIR FIVE-HOUR CONVERSATION. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THE TWO MEN HAD MET. SARKIS GAINED THE CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT ASAD WOULD SUPPORT HIM AS PRESIDENT AND WOULD ENDORSE HIS CHOICE OF PRIME MINISTER. SARKIS, HOWEVER, DID NOT INDICATE WHO THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE, NOR DID ASAD ASK HIM. ASAD HAS NO PROBLEM WITH THE CURRENT CEASE-

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FIRE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND AGREED TO HELP

WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN AGREEMENT ALONG THE LINES OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS.

3. THE LIMITS OF SYRIA'S HELP WERE NOT CLEAR, NOR WAS IT CLEAR TO SARKIS FROM THE CONVERSATION PRECISELY WHAT ASAD'S OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON WERE. SARKIS SAID HE ASKED ASAD DIRECTLY WHAT SYRIA'S LONG-RANGE MOTIVES IN LEBANON WERE. ASAD MAINTAINED THAT HE WISHED TO RESTORE THE AUTHORITY OF THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT. WHEN THIS WAS DONE, SYRIAN FORCES WOULD WITHDRAW FROM LEBANESE TERRITORY. SARKIS DID NOT INDICATE WHETHER HE ACCEPTED THIS PLEDGE. HE DID COME AWAY WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT LEBANESE TERRITORY WAS NOT A SYRIAN OBJECTIVE. SARKIS RAISED WITH ASAD THE POSSIBILITY OF CONCLUDING AN AGREEMENT WHICH WOULD DEFINE THE STATUS OF SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THEY WOULD RETIRE. ASAD STRONGLY PREFERRED THAT THE LEBANESE NOT ASK FOR SUCH AN AGREEMENT BUT SEEMS TO COMPREHEND THE LEBANESE PROBLEM, AS HE INDICATED THAT IF THE LEBANESE DID REQUEST SUCH AN AGREEMENT SYRIA WOULD PROBABLY CONSIDER IT FAVORABLY. (WE WERE ASKED TO HOLD THIS INFORMATION CLOSELY. SARKIS INTENDS TO SEEK SUCH AN AGREEMENT BUT NOT FOR A WHILE AND, IN THE MEAN-TIME, DOES NOT WANT HIS INTENTIONS KNOWN.)

4. ON THE LESS POSITIVE SIDE, SARKIS DID NOT GAIN A CLEAR IMPRESSION OF THE LIMITS OF SYRIAN SUPPORT EITHER IN TERMS OF TIME OR TYPE (HOLDING ACTION AS NOW OR MORE AGGRESSIVE POSTURE WHICH THE LEBANESE WANT). ASAD MADE CLEAR THAT HE DID NOT INTEND TO ANNIHILATE THE PALESTINIANS. HE ADDED THAT PALESTINIANS WERE AWARE OF THIS, AND CONSEQUENTLY JUMBLAT LIED IN HIS STATEMENTS AGAINST ASAD. SARKIS IS PERSUADED THAT ASAD ESPOUSES A "NO VICTOR AND NO VANQUISHED" TYPE OF SETTLEMENT IN LEBANON. SARKIS IS ALSO CONCERNED THAT AS PRESIDENT HE WILL NOT BE CONSULTED BEFOREHAND AS TO ASAD'S USE OF SYRIAN TROOPS ON LEBANESE TERRITORY. ANOTHER PROBLEM IS THAT ASAD WANTS NO NEGOTIATIONS OR CONSULTATIONS WITH JUMBLAT, WHOM HE REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE AS A LEADER OF ANYTHING EXCEPT JUMBLAT'S DRUZE CONSTITUENCY. THIS WORRIES SARKIS BECAUSE HE CONSIDERS THAT PROBABLY THE BEST WAY OF MINIMIZING JUMBLAT'S BALEFUL

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INFLUENCE ON EVENTS IS TO INVOLVE HIM IN RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS.

5. COMMENT: WE SEE TWO SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF THE MEETING BETWEEN SARKIS AND ASAD. SARKIS HAS CLARIFIED TO SOME EXTENT THE SYRIAN POSITION. OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE, HE SEEMS TO HAVE ESTABLISHED THE BASIS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH ASAD.

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